

The Other Side of the Table

Important lessons were learned when the ITIWG exhibited at recent conferences.

by Catherine Lemann

As part of our effort to publicize the efforts of the AALL Information Technology and Implementation Working Group (ITIWG), members of the group exhibited at the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and the Court Technology Conference (CTC5). It was very interesting to get the perspective from the other side of the table, as an exhibitor rather than an attendee.

I attended the NCSL in Philadelphia, August 5–9, 1997. The attendees were primarily legislators and their staffs from around the country. **Michele Finerty** exhibited the Working Group's Web site at CTC5 in Detroit, September 9–12, to judges, court administrators, and Webmasters. **Timothy Coggins** attended the September 29–October 1 meeting of the National Association of State Information Executives in Williamsburg.

First, let me explain the purpose of our exhibit. The Working Group was established by Vice President/President-Elect Frank Houdek in 1996 to "investigate the feasibility of an organized effort by the American Association of Law Libraries and its members to assist judges, legislators, and state elected officials in the planning and implementation of technological approaches for providing access to and organization of information." The Group researched various government information Web sites and identified examples of sites that, using our criteria, presented their information well. We then created a Web site (www.bc.edu/aallwg) that has information on our purposes, our criteria, and reviews of the identified sites.

Our next dilemma was how to publicize the work that we had done. There have been some articles in *AALL Spectrum*, but we wanted to get the word out to more people—Webmasters, technology administrators, judges, legislators, etc. We decided that one effort would be to exhibit at three conferences, hoping that we had chosen good forums to help spread the word.



The author and the ITIWG exhibit at NCSL in Philadelphia in August. "They also serve who only stand and wait."

Exhibitor Nightmares

This was our first experience as exhibitors and we learned a lot! We had a trial run in the Exhibits area at the AALL Conference. I put my two tri-fold posters on the table in Baltimore on Saturday afternoon. When I returned Sunday morning, they were lying on the floor. The huge air conditioning blowers had been turned on and they were pointed directly at the table, knocking the posters off. I arranged to get easels, which actually were better anyway.

The exhibitor registration for NCSL paid for the rental of a 10' by 10' booth. That's all. Everything else was extra. NCSL sent me a 1" binder with information on carpet, tables, chairs, delivery and pickup charges, etc. We were on a budget, so I skipped the carpet and wastebasket but got two chairs with my table.

Because we were first-time exhibitors and had registered late, we were assigned an awful booth location. It was near the back, on the far outside aisle facing the wall. The plenary sessions were held at the other side of the hall. I heard a lot of comments from people who had no idea that there were any exhibitors on our aisle. There were reportedly 7000 attendees; I saw only a small percentage of them. Michele had a better location in Detroit and more interest, proving the realtor's slogan, "location, location, location."

Murphy's Law prevailed in setting up the booths. I didn't have a table when I arrived and had two shrink-wrapped park benches in the booth. Michele had difficulty connecting to the Internet, even though she called from California to verify that the required form had been received. The gods of shipping




The author and one of her easels, in the Activities Area of the Exhibit Hall at the Annual meeting in Baltimore in July.

were uncooperative. The posters did not show up in Detroit until the second day of the exhibit, and the AALL traveling display was returned to Headquarters as unclaimed. Software sent to Detroit never arrived.

In Philadelphia, the exhibit consisted of two homemade posters. After hearing a program at AALL by Laura Ray on effective visual aids, I tried to use stick-on letters. They are hard to handle! I also had some eye-catching, multicolored, photocopied handouts. Although I spent quite a while creating the posters and handouts, they didn't compare to the glossy flyers in other booths. The posters did serve the purpose of drawing people into the booth. In Detroit, Michele also had a computer with a live Internet connection—which was a plus. For future reference, it would probably make sense to get help from someone with a graphics background.

We could not have survived the conferences without help, for which we are very grateful. I sought volunteers from GPLLA. Sandra Proctor (Fox Rothschild O'Brien & Frankel) and Marilyn Roth (PECO Energy) were wonderful and kept me company in the booth. It's always great to meet law librarians from other parts of the country.

Langston Reed (Systems Administrator for the Supreme Court of Louisiana) assisted Michele in Detroit. When she first met Langston, he was already at the booth, connecting the hardware. The next morning, before the exhibit hall opened, he loaded the software (luckily, he brought second copies of the disks that never arrived), and he made certain that she was connected to the Internet.



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Carol Billings (Director of the Law Library of Louisiana) and Bridget Daniels (Supreme Court of Louisiana) met Michele at 7:00 a.m. the first day of the conference to assist in carrying material from her hotel to the Cobo Convention Center. They also helped her break down the exhibit and pack the displays for shipping. And throughout the convention, both Carol and Bridget came by periodically to staff the booth. John Nann (Brooklyn Law School Library) handled the paperwork for the computer hardware, selecting what best suited our requirements. Linda Smith (U.S. Courts Library in Detroit) received the poster and handout shipments, and delivered them to the exhibit hall.

A Positive Reception from Attendees

There was genuine interest in the project of the Working Group. Handouts included "What Makes a Web Site Great," "Guide to Internet Resources Regarding the Use of Technology by State and Local Government Organizations and Examples of Its Use," a

BEST WEB SITES:

The Information Technology and Implementation Working Group's criteria for evaluating Web sites were printed in the June 1997 issue of AALL Spectrum (see sidebar on page 18) and are also found at the Group's Web site: <http://www.bc.edu/aallwg>.

Best Overall Judicial Site:
North Dakota Supreme Court Home Page
<http://sc3.court.state.nd.us/>

Best Appellate Court Site:
Kansas Courts
<http://www.law.ukans.edu/kscourts/kscourts.html>

Court Docket:
NH Supreme Court Oral Argument Lists
<http://www.state.nh.us/courts/supreme/calendar.htm>

Judicial Biographies:
Iowa Supreme Court
<http://www.sos.state.ia.us/register/r3/judsupct.htm>

Court Orders:
Tennessee Supreme Court
<http://www.tsc.state.tn.us/OPINIONS/TSC/rules/scrules.htm>

Court Rules:
Mississippi
<http://www.msllawyer.com/mssc/rules.html>

State Code:
Minnesota State Legislature—Minnesota Statutes and Minnesota Session Laws
<http://www.library.leg.state.mn.us/leg/statutes.htm> or
<http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/leg/statutes96.htm>

Bills/Bill Status:
California Senate Home Page
<http://www.sen.ca.gov/>

Executive Orders:
Louisiana Executive Orders
<http://www.doa.state.la.us/osr/other/exord.htm>

Administrative Orders:
New York State Dept. of Public Service
<http://www.dps.state.ny.us/fileroom.html>

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description of the Information Technology and Implementation Working Group, and the President's Briefing from the April *AALL Spectrum*. A judge asked Michele for 100 copies of the bibliography, "Guide to Internet Resources..." for an upcoming meeting with her fellow judges.

The questions and comments of people who visited the booth indicate that the Working Group has created a useful guide.

Oceana shoot

We were asked how to set up a Web site, what criteria were used in selecting the "Best Sites," and which Web sites are relevant to the courts and state and local governments. Online access to the Web site made it possible to actually view the various sites. The systems analyst for the Judicial Council of California told Michele that he was disappointed we selected the North Dakota page as the best judicial site. However, when he saw the criteria we used, he said he had to agree with us.

There was a lot of positive reaction and interest in AALL as well. We heard many comments about how wonderful law librarians are. A few asked general questions (Was their law librarian a member of AALL? How does a law librarian join AALL? Where does one post law librarian job notices?). AALLNET and the literature sent from Headquarters were useful in these instances. We had AALL brochures and information available and it was snapped up. It was a very gratifying experience. AALL might consider exhibiting at other conferences to heighten its profile. It would also be a shame to lose the insights that Michele and I gained on how to exhibit effectively.

The Conferences

I was able to do a brief tour of the 325 exhibits in the hall. The hottest issue at the NCSL clearly was healthcare. Both sides of almost every issue were represented. Both the National Rifle Association and Handgun Control had exhibits. The Hemlock Society was there, but not opposite the National Right to Life Committee. West Group, which I would judge to be one of the biggest exhibitors at AALL, had a very small booth at NCSL. NASA had a space exhibit, the Homebuilders had a mobile home and Chrysler had a fancy car. I didn't have time to get my picture taken with Elvis. (There was always a long line.) It was a very diverse group of exhibitors!

If you can judge a conference by the freebies, this was a good meeting. The best things I picked up were a Woolrich blanket from the Pennsylvania host committee and a disposable camera from Philip Morris. I've gotten to be selective about what I collect, having finally realized that I have to carry it all home. I picked up pens, pencils, highlighters, pads, sticky notes, and letter slitters but didn't bother with mugs.

NCSL had a variety of speakers at its sessions and luncheons. Vice President Gore, economic commentator Louis Rukeyser ("Wall Street Week"), author and educator Kathleen Hall Jamieson (*Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership*), and Penn State football coach Joe Paterno were among the big names. The session topics included reapportionment, health care, safe driving, child care, welfare reform and more. Obviously, these



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are the hot topics that we know our legislators are grappling with in their home states. The program indicated that they were able to attract a variety of well-qualified speakers from government, industry, and special interest groups.

CTC5 was a better fit for the Working Group’s exhibit because it was more specifically focused. There were a number of court Webmasters attending the meeting who were interested in our selection process.

Conclusions

There were people who had no idea that there is a law librarian association. I wonder sometimes if we fulfill the “mousy librarian image” too well by not promoting ourselves and our profession more actively to more law-related professionals. I believe that law librarians are more powerful and have more to offer to related professions than we realize. I urge AALL to consider more cooperative efforts, such as the National Conference on Legal Information Issues, to educate others on how we can work together to best organize and make legal information accessible. Justice George Nicholson (California Court of Appeal) speaks of his admiration of law librarians and his belief that we can make a bigger contribution. I am always energized and daunted by the opportunities we have. I hope that the Working Group is only a first step in exploring ways that we can promote the dissemination of legal information.

On the shuttle bus from the airport to the hotels, I heard how this was a wonderful opportunity for legislators to compare notes on what actions their legislatures are taking. In the past there had been negative comments on the use of public funds to send people to this Conference. During the Conference, I heard a piece on National Public Radio that there was a similar complaint this year from Iowa. Any of us who have been at local, regional, or national law librarian meetings know the value of meeting with our colleagues from other parts of the country. We exchange solutions, ideas, and grumble together. It helps to remember that we are not alone and are part of a bigger community that has similar interests.

Finally, I enjoyed walking around Philadelphia. The Convention Center is on the edge of Chinatown. I ate wonderful Chinese and Thai food. Across the street is the Reading Terminal Market. There are food stalls, butchers, bakers, florists, green grocers, candy, etc. It was a great place to have lunch. There was a Pennsylvania Dutch festival while I was there. On Saturday they were giving cart rides around the block. I look forward to returning when the AALL Convention is in Philadelphia in 2000.

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